Interview with Clinton L. Olson

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR CLINTON L. OLSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is April 17, 1996, and this is an interview with Clinton L. Olson. My name is Charles Stuart Kennedy and this is being done for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. To start at the beginning, could you tell me when and where you were born, and something about your parents?

OLSON: I was born in South Dakota in 1916. One of my parents had been born in Iowa and one was born in South Dakota. They lived most of their lives in South Dakota, but some in Nebraska. Eventually they moved to California and retired in Los Angeles, at the end of the war. I went to high school in California when I was 15 years old.

Q: Where in California?

OLSON: In Glendale. I went to Glendale High School and then to Hoover High School.

Q: When you finished high school in the Los Angeles area, what was your father doing?

OLSON: My father was selling electric light plants. He was associated with Westinghouse back in South Dakota. He then retired in California.

Q: When did you get out of high school?

OLSON: In 1934.

Q: Right in the middle of the depression?

OLSON: Right.

Q: So then what?

OLSON: Then I worked for a year in Los Angeles. I had an appointment to Annapolis and planned to go when my appointment was withdrawn because of reapportionment of congressional districts. I was too old to apply the next year, so I worked for a year, and then I applied to various universities and was awarded scholarships to Stanford, MIT, and CAL Tech. I took the Stanford scholarship, and entered there in 1935 and graduated in 1939. I went from there to the Graduate School of Business. I was a Reserve Officer in the Army and I was called to Active Duty in 1941 before receiving my M.B.A.

Q: What branch were you in?

OLSON: Ordnance. I was called to Active Duty in January 1941.

Q: I wonder if by any chance that you knew my cousin Austin Carpenter? He was in Stanford in field artillery around that time, maybe a little later.

OLSON: Not that I remember. I was in the field artillery, I had two years of that. Then being in engineering, I became an Ordnance Officer. A handful of us became Ordnance Officers.

Q: So this was in 1941 that you were called up?

OLSON: Yes, January 1941.

Q: What did they do with you?

OLSON: I was sent to the office of Chief of Ordnance in Washington. Ordnance Officers were as scarce as hen's teeth at that time.

Q: What is an Ordnance Officer as opposed to an Artillery Officer?

OLSON: An Ordnance Officer handled the guns and ammunition and the technical side of the military equipment. Ordnance was strictly guns, ammunition, etc. There was a shortage of Ordnance Officers in those days. I was a second Lieutenant, and became the Production Control Officer for the Small Arms Division in the Ordnance Department in Washington, DC. As such, I did the Production Control work three machine gun, and machine gun ammunition factories. That was in the spring of 1941 and by the summer of 1941 I was doing that work for nine machine gun factories. It was during this period that I became associated with a lot of people with our military supply programs. We were supplying machine guns to the British, the Aussies, the Dutch, and to some of our own people. One thing led to another and the “powers that be” decided to send a special mission to the Soviet Union — The Lend Lease Program.

Q: Is this prior to our entrance into the war or after?

OLSON: Prior to our entry in the war. This was September 1941. They sent a joint British and American special mission to set up a Military Supply Program for the Soviet Union. Then out of the clear blue sky, I was selected as one of the staff to go to the Soviet Union. We flew to London where we met with the other members of our mission under Averell Harriman.We were in London for ten days of conferences with the other members of our mission. Our mission was headed by Averell Harriman. The British part of the mission was headed by Lord Beaverbrook. Our London meetings concluded with a luncheon at 10 Downing St. hosted by Winston Churchill. Our mission then joined our two B-24 bombers at Prestwick, Scotland. This was the 24th of September 1941. This you will realize was

before Pearl Harbor but the war in Europe was raging on. Our bombers were B-24s (Liberators). We had never seen one of these since they were our newest planes. They were numbers 73 and 75 built. The actual numbers were “3” and “5” built. The numbers were to mislead the Germans.On the late afternoon of September 24th we climbed aboard our planes in Prestwick, Scotland and were off to Russia. Our plane carried the crew and eight passengers, four on each side of the catwalk. They included Colonel Philip Famonville who became Chief of our mission to Moscow, Konstantine Oumanski, the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. and Quentin Reynolds, Foreign correspondent of Colliers magazine. From Prestwick we headed for Archangel via the North Cape. Off the Shetland Islands, we were suddenly attacked by three strange aircraft out of the setting sun, firing 20 M.M. guns. We thought we had had it, but the firing suddenly stopped and along side came three R.A.F. Spitfires. They waggled their wings to say “sorry chaps.” the word hadn't reached the R.A.F. that we were flying in that area. Happily we had American flags painted on the wings so they finally recognized us.It became quite an eventful flight off the North Cape. Some strange planes came after us but we were able to duck into some clouds and lost them.We were supposed to land at Archangel but we saw that the airfield was too small to get out of if we landed there. After checking our fuel supply, we decided we could probably make Moscow with careful flying. So, to the consternation of the Russians, we flew on. They sent MiG fighters after us who dove on us but didn't try to knock us down. After about six more hours of flying, we were over Moscow and, after some miscues by the Russians, we landed. As we taxied up to the air terminal, all four engines stopped. We were out of gas! All this after 15# hours of flying, which set the world over water record at the time. We flew most of the time at about 22,000 feet, which was the maximum altitude for B-24s. We were freezing to death in our heavy sheepskin flying suits but it was about 40 below zero at that altitude.After landing, we were all taken to the Hotel National in Moscow, which was to be our home for a few days. That first evening, there was a reception for our mission at the ambassador's residence, Spaso House, to make a arrangements for the conference.The conference began the next morning at Spiridonifka, the Government's guest home. Aside from the principal

delegates - Beaverbrook and Harriman - the participants were: Soviets - Colonel General Yacolev, Colonel General Colkov, and some other Lt. Generals; the British were General Sir Hastings Ismay, Lt. General Sir Gordon McCready, Lt. General Sir Mason McFarland, Lt. General Sir Allen Brook and Colonel Exham. Our delegation was Major General James Burns, Colonel Bundy and Lt. Olson. What a surprise this was to be named a delegate - participant of the Military Supply Committee.We met for two days discussing the lists of military and other supplies and equipment each side wanted and what each side was able to supply.At the end of the day, we were all escorted to the Catherine the Great Room of the Kremlin, where Stalin served as host of an incredible banquet for about 80 people. I was by far the lowest ranking person present. The banquet consisted of 26 courses and there were 36 toasts of vodka, wine, etc., drunk. The session lasted until 3 a.m. with movies, etc. Needless to say no one was in very good shape by the time it was over.The next day, Harriman called the American side together and announced that agreement had been reached on a military supply program for the Soviet Union, and that some would have to stay behind to administer the program. This was good news for me since it meant, I thought, that I could return home. To my surprise, Harriman said, “General Faymonville, you will be chief of the Military Supply Mission to the Soviet Union. Lieutenant OLSON, you will be his deputy, for the time being. And thus it was nearly two years before I got out of Russia.

Q: What was your impression of both your reception in Moscow and also Moscow at this time? This was just at the height of the German offensive.

OLSON: We had the feeling that the Russians were ready for anything. They were losing ground to the Germans everywhere.

Q: What was your impression of Stalin?

OLSON: Well, I met Stalin. He was a man about five feet five inches tall and he shook my hand with a very limp handshake. He noticed the red, white, and blue shoulder patch

on my uniform and he asked Oumanski, who was the interpreter, about it. Oumanski said to me, “I guess he thinks you're a Marshal, a big star. That is the sign of a Marshal in the Soviet Union.” Quentin Reynolds and Wallace Carroll, who were correspondents, were standing behind me, and unbeknownst to me, they recorded all of this. About three weeks later, an article came out on the front page of the New York Times, saying, “Stalin mistakes American Lieutenant for a Marshal.” Stalin, when you looked at him, had white hair and sallow skin and you wondered if he was this “man-eating dictator” of all the Russians. He was a quiet-looking little man, until you looked at his eyes. Then you could feel that here was a powerful person.

Q: It was a pretty difficult time?

OLSON: Yes, the Germans were at the gate of Moscow. On the morning of October 15th, I was following the reports for the military attaché on the radio and listening in and I went to General Faymonville and said, “I don't know what our policy is going to be, but it seems to me that we were sent here to help the Red Army even if the Germans come in and try to get around us.” The General said, “Yes, I think that's right. I'll go and see the Ambassador.” He went to see Ambassador Steinhardt and I didn't hear from either of them for several hours. All of a sudden, I got a telephone call from Faymonville and he said, “Clint, don't disturb anybody, but pass the word around that we've got to leave town in four hours.” So I had to race around and get a hole of everybody who was in Moscow and we arranged to get to the American Embassy. In the meantime, a blizzard had come up. We could hear the guns. They were fairly close to Moscow. We had heard the guns earlier. This big storm came up and we were told that we were going to go take the train to the Kazan station and we would move out to the East. At midnight, we finally got the orders to move out. So, carrying what little baggage we had with us, we went to the station and the populace were already starting to panic. So, we marched to the station with the Soviets' Kremlin Guard holding back the populace. We climbed aboard the train and eventually under way. We headed toward the East or Southeast.

Q: Where did you set up your quarters?

OLSON: First, we were in Moscow. After that, we were in the American Embassy.

Q: When you left Moscow, where did you go?

OLSON: We left Moscow and were en route for almost six days to go 500 miles. We ended up in Kuybyshev. There was an old school building which we took over and that became our quarters and our headquarters. It probably had 25 to 30 small rooms. That became our home away from home. We were not very well supplied. On the train going out, we had few supplies. Not much in the way of food, but we had an excellent supply of liquor. It kept our morale up on the train. It took us about six days to make that trip. There were a couple of trains behind us. One of them had the Bolshoi Opera and the Ballet and just by coincidence, all of us being young Americans, by the time we got to Kuybyshev, the trains were all mixed up. So we had the good luck to get to know a fair number of Bolshoi Ballet. As I said, we didn't have much to eat, but we had a lot to drink.

Q: To move on, what was your mission doing in Kuybyshev? When were supplies starting to come in?

OLSON: Some were coming in immediately. Our job really was to keep track of those supplies coming in, answering the requests of the Russians for the war supplies that they wanted. As it turned out, most of this was done through Washington, between Moscow and Washington. We really did not, honestly, have a hell of a lot to do a lot of the time.

Q: Could you talk a bit about your Commanding General? He was an infamous figure. How did you see him at the time? I've had other views from books and so on. Jim MacArthur had very strong views about him. But what was your impression of him? Where was he coming from?

OLSON: As you probably know from history, he was rather friendly towards the Soviets - somewhat pro-Communist. He was really one of the guys who selected me for this mission. I didn't know that much about him except that he went to Stanford. He was a brilliant man. He was a bit of a protégé of Eleanor Roosevelt, as it turned out. I didn't know all of this when we first got involved. They were sort of “ultra liberal” in their approach to things. He was very secretive for the most part. He was a very gentle, nice, guy in social occasions. He was so regarded, not only by the attachés, but also by the Embassy in Moscow. Some of them were absolutely convinced after a year or so that he was working for the Soviets. There was nothing to indicate that he was disloyal, but I can understand why these fictions came about. I had many conversations with the General in which I disagreed with him on what the Russians were doing, and on Russian policy. I could say this for Faymonville, instead of knocking my ears down, which he could have done, he allowed me to project my opinions.

Q: From my understanding, part of the atmosphere was that they weren't giving due credit to the fact that these were our supplies coming and also our people were under tremendous restrictions. Here we were allies and were supplying them and we were being treated almost as an enemy. Was that true where you were?

OLSON: Absolutely true. We were under surveillance wherever we went. They were doing some surveillance, as primitive as they were in those days. Although some of them weren't so primitive.

Q: It seems that it happened at that time, it's almost hard to recreate it, but there were people who were like “I saw the future and it works.” People were seeing the Soviet Union in a glorified way.

OLSON: Like Joe Davies.

Q: It's as if almost all judgment was suspended.

OLSON: That was the Roosevelt sort of approach to things. That is all very true. I happily had an interesting diplomatic job, not to cross swords with the General and not cross swords with my comrades in the Army. We worked that out okay. That attachés sneaked an FBI guy in at one point and he made a report and about ten years ago when one of the books that was written about that period came out, I was quoted as saying, “General Faymonville is not fit to wear the uniform for the United States.” I was very upset with what had been written. I was very upset by that because, while I disagreed with Faymonville on many things, I would never make a statement like that.

Q: As a young man in this very tight little community, I assume that you were getting together with some of our younger officers, Tommy Thompson and those. Were they coming at you and saying, “Can't you do something about your General?”

OLSON: No, the ones who were coming at us like Mike Michela, the Army attaché, who was really almost paranoid about Faymonville. He had been trained into that by Ivan Yeaton, the previous military attaché. They hated Faymonville. They felt powerless inside the Embassy. They felt the attaché should be more powerful than the Special Mission Officers.

Q: It's the usual thing. Power goes to who's got something to hand out. If you've got something to hand out you're not going to get it, so maybe part of Faymonville's problem was the fact of the jealousy on the part of the attaché.

OLSON: Well, even before that, Faymonville having been the military attaché in Russia back in the 1920's and 1930's, was much more experienced than these other guys. They were jealous of the history involved. He was a very capable guy and had quite a following of sycophants. His reputation was further denigrated by Roosevelt sending people like Joe Davies over on Special Missions. Joe Davies was one of the biggest idiots I ever met in my life and everybody knew that.

Q: Yes, he was a very wealthy man who had been Ambassador there who portrayed Stalin as a benign ruler.

OLSON: Well, he started showing his would be “Mission to Moscow” in the American Embassy in Moscow and the British Ambassador and all of the other allied Ambassador's were there to listen to him. After about half a dozen sentences, there were some giggles and pretty soon half of them got up and left. Joe Davies got mad at that point and walked out. He was mad that these people who had walked out on him. I could go on at length about Joe and my relationship with him.

Q: Why don't we move on. What happened to you? What did you do?

OLSON: In the spring and summer of 1942, I was sent to Murmansk along with a wonderful Naval Officer, Admiral Frankel, then Captain, was holding the fort in Murmansk. In the meantime, they bombed up to 14 times a day from 20 minutes flying time away. They would drop their loads and would come back. I was blown out of bed and the floor above me blown away on one occasion. Happily, there were no injuries.

Q: What was the impression during this period about the American Military community and the survivability of the Soviet Union, by this tie?

OLSON: By that time, Laurence Steinhardt, who had been the Ambassador and the Military Attaché Ivan Yeaton were of the opinion that the German's would wipe out the Russians. Then came the evacuation of Moscow and they were all counting on that sort of thing happening. Actually when the Russians started to regain control and set off a couple of offensives that were quite successful in changing the atmosphere. Then everybody was pro Soviet, pro Russian and pro victory, and not afraid of losing.

Q: How were you treated as Americans in Murmansk? The British and the Americans were taking tremendous losses in getting to convoys in Murmansk. How were you treated?

OLSON: On the whole, fairly well. Frankel did a great job in Murmansk in gaining support. He was pretty well liked by the Russians up there and those who were right at the front line in effect were generally pro American. We had no great trouble. We didn't have the type of surveillance up there that we had when we were around Moscow. We were treated much better in North Russian than we were in Moscow.

Q: Were you in Murmansk for long?

OLSON: About two months.

Q: And then where?

OLSON: I went back to Moscow. In the meantime, we moved our headquarters in the Military Mission from Kuybyshev, back to Moscow. That was in January 1942. Then I sent off to Tehran, where we had the Persian Gulf Command coming in and I was involved in establishing communications and liaison with our Mission in Moscow.

Q: We want to move rather rapidly on to get you into the Foreign Service because I'm thinking of time. Were there any particular incidents in your impression of Iran and how we were dealing with Iran in those days?

OLSON: Well, we, the British and the U.S., came into Iran to set up the supply route through Iran up to Russia. That was a relatively smooth operation. The only problems were the Russians, who had moved into northern Iran, at the same time that the British moved into the rest of the country. They kept a close eye on us and tried to keep us out. You probably didn't know this, but I spent the net two years in Iran, after I left Russia.

Q: So you were two years in Iran. From when to when?

OLSON: It wasn't two years, it was from the summer of 1944 until December of 1945. I left in December.

Q: While you were there, was the Iranian Government more or less bypassed?

OLSON: Yes. We were occupying it, for all practical purposes. I was OSS in those years.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

OLSON: I was in Secret Intelligence, SI.

Q: Against whom?

OLSON: Against the Russians. Supposedly, I was looking for Germans in Iran, but most of them had been eradicated and so what I ended up doing largely was Economic Intelligence in Iran. I was undercover part of the time. I had a cover job, as Fiscal Advisor to the Persian Gulf Command.

Q: What were you looking at in Intelligence? You say economic intelligence - whose economic activities and what sort of things were you looking at?

OLSON: We were just looking at what the Russians were up to, primarily. Spying on the Russians's activities.

Q: Was there concern that the Soviets were going to take over Northern Iran?

OLSON: Oh, yes. Very definitely. They were building bases, not physical bases, but they were establishing a foot hold all around the Northern Persian area.

Q: Could you get in there?

OLSON: I was in the North a couple of times and it was always a little bit “hairy” to get in there. They didn't like that and you were likely to be picked up. I didn't do too much prowling in there. I was staying in Tehran most of the time. I was assigned to Baghdad also. It wasn't very successful, actually.

Q: No, but it does show that there was a concern there. What happened in 1945 when you left there?

OLSON: I got out of the Army.

Q: Then what?

OLSON: Then I was in private business for about two years.

Q: Until about 1947?

OLSON: Yes, 1947.

Q: Then what?

OLSON: I took the Foreign Service exams in 1947 and entered the Foreign Service in early 1948.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the oral exams? Did you take an oral exam?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: What was it like? Do you remember the atmosphere or the type of things that they were asking you?

OLSON: I remember very well in that my examiner was a fellow named Leland Morris. He didn't know that I was a guy behind the scenes when I was in Iran for two years. When he found that out back in Washington, he was madder than hell. When I arrived to take the Foreign Service oral exam, I didn't know who I was going to face, but there were half a dozen Officers there. I came in under the War Manpower Act. I saw Ambassador Morris and he looked at me with a grin on his face and said, “Well, Colonel OLSON, how nice to see you again under these circumstances.” And the son of a bitch set out to kill me.

An example, “Colonel, you were in the Soviet Union once weren't you?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Can you name six Soviet Far Eastern Ports?” That's all there were and two of them were very obscure and I knew them. So he asked me to name 20 cities along the Trans Siberian Railroad. I thought there was nothing to that. Everything he asked me, I had the answers for. He kept getting madder and madder. I didn't know whether I was going to pass the damn thing or not. On one question, he said, “Well, you know a little bit about American history, at least you should.” He said, “Explain the circumstances surrounding the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Where did that take place?” and so on. I was caught short. I started to give the history of it and I said, “I'm sorry to say that I don't recall that at the moment,” and he said, “Well, you'd better look that up in your dictionary.” The dictionary? He was a nit wit. I passed the exam. I was pretty well informed. I passed with flying colors. I ran into the Minister and he saw me in the hall of the State Department the next day and he came up to me and said, “Colonel, I want to congratulate you on your magnificent performance under the most difficult conditions.” What the old boy succeeded in doing was as a Manpower guy, I should have come in as a FS-03 or FS-04, and he was able to get that cut down to a 5, so I came in as a 5.

Q: Which is about the equivalent of First Lieutenant, or a little better than that.

OLSON: I was madder than hell, but I decided to go on with the Foreign Service.

Q: What was your first assignment?

OLSON: Vienna.

Q: This was the high time of Vienna, wasn't it?

OLSON: This was the “Third Man” days.

Q: There's a movie called “The Third Man.” Could you tell me somewhat about the atmosphere there and what you were doing?

OLSON: My first job was as an Economic Officer in the East-West Trade Control. I was involved in that always.

Q: When were you there?

OLSON: I was there from 1948 to the end of 1952.

Q: So the Cold War had started. Czechoslovakia had happened, NATO was put together.

OLSON: The Cold War was very much there and Vienna was a tricky place to live in at that time. Especially if you were doing the kind of work that I was doing in the East-West Trade Control. I've got some newspaper articles there from those days in Vienna in which the Communist press were always attacking me. I became known as “Marshal Commissar.”

Q: Did that feel a little bit ironic? You had moved from trying to push supplies into the Soviet Union to keeping supplies out of the Soviet Union.

OLSON: That was a bit ironic.

Q: How old were you when you started in 1948?

OLSON: I was 32 years old.

Q: At that time, we didn't have an Ambassador there, did we?

OLSON: No, we had a Minister, Jack Earhart. Well, of course, we had military occupation and we had a Military High Commissioner, Lieutenant General Jeffrey Keyes, and the legation was operated as a normal diplomat establishment, except there was a big argument about who was really in charge. Was it the Military High Commissioner or was it the Minister? It was sort of left in the open as to what they would be. I got really involved in that because I was made Political Advisor to the Military High Commissioner. I spoke

pretty good Russian at that point, and during the Russian attempts to take over Austria I was up to my ears in that. I was Political Advisor to Lieutenant General Keyes. That used to drive my diplomatic colleagues crazy in the Embassy because I had the simulated rank of Major General and I was a class five Officer. There were some people who didn't appreciate that very much.

Q: How did Keyes approach the situation in Austria? It was a divided country the same way Germany was at that point into zones.

OLSON: We had five zones, British, French, American, Russian, and Vienna. The control of the latter changed every month; it was rotated. The Russians were very much in control of their area. There were shootouts every night all over the place.

Q: Who was shooting at whom?

OLSON: Russian agents against American agents and British and French. Did you see the movie “The Third Man?”

Q: Yes.

OLSON: That's the way it was. We dragged bodies out of the Danube canal practically every morning. It was like the Wild West.

Q: What was Keyes' approach to this whole situation?

OLSON: As the U.S. High Commissioner, his mandate was to just be in charge, to represent the Americans in all of Austria, but to be in charge of the American zone. And to meet with the other Commanders of divided Vienna and governing Vienna. The so-called High Commission. They had a very well-organized arrangement. They had a Secretariat for signals for all of the military aspects, for transportation, for all of the different functions.

Q: When you were wearing your other hat at one time or another of working on East-West Control Trade, where would you get your information?

OLSON: We had a good intelligence operation there. The best was with the Intercept System. Intercepts of all communications! This information was screened and we got so we could read between the lines on those beautifully.

Q: Your job is really much more of an Intelligence Analyst than doing the traditional economic job of going around and visiting people and talking to them.

OLSON: Yes, exactly.

Q: I'm surprised that you didn't get absorbed into the CIA during this period.

OLSON: Well, I was offered a fairly senior appointment in the CIA when I left the Army. But I had had two years of leading a double life in Iran and I decided that wasn't for me.

Q: You left in 1952?

OLSON: 1952.

Q: Where did you go then?

OLSON: I went to Washington. It was the time of McCarthy and Dulles had just cut the State Department by 25%.

Q: A RIF - reduction in force.

OLSON: So I was supposed to go to Denmark first, then to Sweden. But all of these things were shot out from under me before I could get them. In the meantime, I was called at 11:00 one night by a Mr. Kennedy, who wanted to talk to me. I asked him who he

represented and he said, “I'm with what they call The McCarthy Committee.” He invited me to lunch the next day.

Q: Was this Robert Kennedy?

OLSON: Yes, but I didn't know that at the time. He told me that he understood that I was a specialist with the East-West Trade Control and I told him that I had quite a lot to do with it. He wanted to talk to me. So I had lunch with Bobby at Harvey's and, as I came into Harvey's, I recognized who I was dealing with. I said, “My God, you're Jack's brother,” and he said, “Yes, do you know Jack?” I said, “Yes.” Jack was in Stanford Business School for awhile with me. The proposition that Bobby offered me was that I would tell the committee all that I knew about how East-West Trade Controls were handled. He said, “We know that you've done a great job, but we want you to tell the truth about all of the other people in your field. They're not doing a good job and we know that.” I looked at Bobby Kennedy and asked him if he was serious, and he was. I told him that he could tell the Senator to go straight to Hell. I wouldn't have any part of that. Bobby got mad and said, “We can subpoena you.” I said, “I know you can, you just told me that, but you also just told me that I was doing a good job. If you want to subpoena me, you can wreck my career without any great trouble.” Bobby and talked a bit about East-West Trade Controls and he did manage to get me diverted to the Toby Committee, which was the proper committee to be handling this. In executive session, there was never any leak. We were afraid of a leak because I was controlling trade out of Vienna and, if the Soviets had known that, the balloon would have gone up. That's why I couldn't talk about it.

Q: Where did you end up going?

OLSON: I was trying to get the hell out of Washington because the McCarthy Committee were still interested in me and one of my colleagues asked me if I would like to be Consul in Martinique. I said, “Great! Whose is it?” I became Consul to the French West Indies.

Q: When were you there?

OLSON: I was there for two and a half years, from 1952 to 1955.

Q: What was the situation in Martinique and the French West Indies at that period? It had been under Vichy during the war. What were American interests there?

OLSON: The principal interest was that Martinique had the highest free Communist vote in the world, 63% in Martinique and 43% in Guadeloupe. It was mainly studying the size of the Communist Party and who was involved. The Party turned out to be a personality cult. The leader of the Party in Martinique was a fellow named Aime Ceasar, who was a Deputy in Chamber of Deputies. He was a rabid Communist. I used to walk through the streets of Port au France with Aime and we'd discuss Communist dialectics. During this period, Stalin died and Ceasar was invited to his funeral in Moscow. I'd always told Aime, “You think you're a loyal Frenchman, but you really can't be while you're working for the Soviet Union.' He went to Stalin's funeral and, when he came back from that, - he was a blue black in color - he came back as a gray black. He was really shaken up. As a result, Ceasar slipped out of the Communist Party of France and established an independent party. The result was that they had about a 13% vote instead of a 63% Communist vote and the Communist problem in Martinique started to evaporate. There were a hell of a lot of radical groups around. Then I was sent by Loy Henderson to the Office of Budget. That was the last job that I wanted, but you went where they sent you.

Q: You had your business background.

OLSON: I was assigned as a Budget Examiner in the Office of Budget.

Q: When was this?

OLSON: This was from 1955 to 1956. Then I was asked by Loy if I would like to be Executive Director of Latin American Affairs. I had that job for two and a half years.

Q: That would be from 1956 to 1959. Executive Director is a Chief Administrator of our Regional Bureau. ARA has always been almost it's own empire within the Foreign Service. People got into it and they never seemed to leave - that was the reputation. They have their own dynamics. This was your first time associated with it.

OLSON: The first time and the only time.

Q: What was your impression of the ARA Bureau at that time?

OLSON: Well, it operated pretty much like any other bureau, except, that you did have unity in the language that was used primarily, with the exception of Portuguese. The thing that happened to people in ARA was not so much that they wanted to be there and insisted on being there, but the other bureaus were reluctant to take people from ARA in. It was more that side of the story. I knew a hell of a lot of good people who wanted to get out of ARA, but they were sort of blocked.

Q: Were you able to try and break down these boundaries between ARA and the other geographic bureaus?

OLSON: I was able to get some good people into our ARA and I was able to help some people get out. But you know how those personnel sessions went. It was very hard to get somebody from ARA into EUR, for example. EUR, everybody felt in those days, not so much anymore, that they had the more attractive posts. Then there were always a lot of people who wanted to be involved in the Russian side of things. Nobody wanted to go to Africa.

Q: There wasn't that much in Africa at this time during the 1950's.

OLSON: There really wasn't much there. At that time, Soapy Williams was Assistant Secretary of State for Africa.

Q: He came in 1961.

OLSON: Is that when he came in?

Q: We're still talking about the 1956 to 1959 period, when you were in ARA. Were there any posts that caused particular problems for you?

OLSON: Yes, there was one that caused great problems for me - that was Nigeria.

Q: But we're talking about ARA.

OLSON: There were no posts that caused any particular problems for me. I had some run-ins with some Ambassadors who wanted more money for the administrative side of things. But they were all solved in good humor and good form.

Q: Was this at the time when Argenz was overthrown in Guatemala and Peurifoy was Ambassador down there?

OLSON: I was in Martinique in those days. I got a telegram to check on all ships going into that area and to report on a daily basis. I had a regular program Vice Consul and a USIA Officer, so there were three of us and the only material we had to work with were code books. We had 50 ships coming in at any one time. We were going crazy at that time. The big problem that I had on that one was that there was a ship called the Wolf something and that was the one that they were looking or. It sailed into Guadeloupe waters and so I prevailed upon the French to hold the ship and to look it over. Well, Washington wanted more than that. They wanted to see the cargo. They wanted it at least partially loaded. With using up all of my good will, and with great difficulty, I got the French to go along with that, and they tore the ship apart, but there were no munitions on it. It was a decoy. The real ship from East Germany sailed into Guatemala with no problems whatsoever and it was unloaded there. I was in a very embarrassing position.

Q: How did you find that ARA did in budget battles at this time? The bureaus would always fight each other to get enough money.

OLSON: I think they did as well as anybody else. They may have done a little better. In 1956, I was grabbed by the Under Secretary and told that I was going to be the Deputy Chief of Protocol because Vic Purse was fired because his wife had accepted the gift of an Oldsmobile convertible.

Q: A yellow Oldsmobile convertible. I remember this. This car was renowned.

OLSON: So they said that I would be the new Deputy Chief of Protocol. I really didn't want that position.

Q: A social position.

OLSON: There's a lot of work involved in it. I said, “Like hell I am. I don't want it.” They guy said, “Unless you can get somebody equally qualified to take your place, you're the new Deputy Chief of Protocol.” In the meantime, I would handle the tip that Purse was supposed to take care of. I asked what it was and he said that it was to escort six Irish Senators and six Irish Congressmen and their wives to Ireland, and I said, “Okay.” So, I was off for Ireland on a month's mission.

Q: I take it that this was just sort of a junket, wasn't it?

OLSON: Oh, hell yes. They were all Irish Congressmen and Senators.

Q: When you say “Irish,” you mean Irish American?

OLSON: Yes. That was a trial.

Q: I'd like to get a feel of that. Can you tell me why it was a trial?

OLSON: I got this notice that I was going to be the guy. Actually, I wasn't the guy. Ed Crouch was there and he was the Budget Officer of the Department. He was there, but I was the one who did the work. I was in charge of everything. So, to begin with, this was very sudden and so my wife came along with me on the train to New York to say goodbye when I was taking off. There was a big party in New York at a shabby little place called the Waldorf-Astoria and there was all of this group in one big party, booze flowing like nothing you've every seen, an absolute bunch of drunken bums. I was with them until 4:00 the next morning and with Congressman John Rooney, who was the Chairman of the whole thing.

Q: He was a powerful figure because he controlled State Department finance.

OLSON: My job was basically to look after John Rooney. At 4:00 the next morning, I literally carried Rooney home, drunker than hell. I had a couple of hours to roll over in bed and get back to the boat, to take care of all of the arrangements. We were sailing the next day. That was quite a task. We were on the America and none of the Congressman's wives liked the quarters we had. It was a full ship, so I talked to the Captain and asked what we were going to do about it. We've got all of these unhappy people on the America and the Captain asked what I would suggest. I assigned every one of them to a new room on the ship. They didn't know it, but they were just exchanging rooms, not getting anything better. But they had gotten attention, which is what they were after. We got aboard the ship for five and one-half days. It was a real binge all the way. Rooney wanted me under his thumb every minute. We got to Ireland and the purpose really was to dedicate a statue to Commodore John Barry.

Q: He was the first Commander of the U.S. Navy.

OLSON: Which wasn't quite true, but he Irish thought that. We dedicated the statue in Wexford, Ireland and then our group broke up. Congressman John J. Rooney and the main group went to London after that, and there was one big party around London and then the same in Paris, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. People came and went, but it was a

key group of Congressmen and their staff. It was very exhausting, I must say. Some of the stuff they got into you can't believe. I had to get them out of it and take care of them.

Q: Girls? Not paying bills? What?

OLSON: Katie Rooney was along, so she kept the girls pretty much out of the picture, thank God. We had, for example, a big night at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm, a pretty fancy place and they had a Spanish Orchestra playing. Rooney wanted to go up and talk to them. He went up to the stage and I followed along and, just as he got to the stage, I found out that this was an anti-Franco orchestra. I had to rescue him before they tore him apart. Then he wanted to see somebody someplace else. He went off and I found him in an argument in the kitchen with one of the chefs. I got him out of there at the time the chef was about to come after him with a meat cleaver. In the meantime, Katie kept saying, “Where's John? Where's John?” That's just one example of some of the stops along the line. We finally came back on an American flag vessel, the Liberte.

Q: What happened? I guess that somebody else was found for the protocol job?

OLSON: Yes. I was still on the hook and a good friend of mine was looking around for a DCM job with Latin America, Bob Corrigan.

Q: I know Bob.

OLSON: He came in to see me about a DCM job and I said, “Bob, keep this quiet, but I've the real job for you. If you play this right, I can get you a job as Deputy Chief of Protocol.” He said, “Oh, really?” I got Bob to take the job. I could have had the Chief of Protocol job had I wanted it, but Wiley Buchanan was still in the picture, so it was Deputy for the time being. After years as Executive Director, in which I visited nearly every post in Latin America, I then went to the National War College in 1959 to 1960. I was supposed to go from there as the Supervising Consul General in Germany as a temporary post. I was supposed to get the Political Counselor job in Bonn and, all of a sudden, they said that

they had to cancel my assignment because they needed me for something else. I asked them for what. Charlie Mace wanted to get out of the job of Administrative Counselor of London and they asked me if I wanted to take that. London is a very attractive place, so I accepted. I arrived in London just in time to take over the new Embassy, which was still under construction.

Q: The one with the huge eagle on it.

OLSON: I was the guy that raised the eagle on it. So, I had two years ago.

Q: You were there from 1960 to 1962?

OLSON: Right.

Q: Who was the Ambassador when you arrived? This would have still been a Republican under Eisenhower.

OLSON: “Jock” Whitney was there as Chief of Mission when I first arrived and he was the one who came down when we were about to raise the eagle. We consulted on that and we agreed that it should go up.

Q: Could you explain what the controversy was about the eagle?

OLSON: This was the damnedest story you ever heard. There was no controversy, really, about the eagle, but they made one up. This was done by some of our own nice female legislators, Congresswomen. We had two of them, one was from St. Louis and the other was Edna Kelly, who was from Brooklyn. They would go off on binges and have a good time. They were in London and they were binging around the place when they suddenly decided that they ought to have some official business to report on when they went back. They tried to call on somebody, but it was the middle of summer and everybody was out of town, except for one Trotskyite Deputy by the name of Sydney Silverman. They called on him and they asked how the relations were going with the United States and could they

do anything? He told them that there was one thing that he didn't like and that he was going to raise hell about it. Edna asked him what that was, and he told her that we were going to put a Nazi eagle on top of the new Embassy in London. Well, that was that. They got on their boat and returned home. Reporters met them at the dock, as usual, and they asked what they found out on their trip. Edna said that she was going to look into the fact that we're putting up a Nazi eagle on the top of the new Embassy in London. That made a small article in the back of the “Brooklyn Eagle.”

Q: We're talking about an inch and a quarter of text in the back of the newspaper.

OLSON: Well, of course, the British were always looking for something to get at the United States for, and a little column like that became front page in the “News of the World” or one of the tabloids, “Americans Putting Nazi Eagle on the New U.S. Embassy.” That's what people like Edna Kelly can do for us. That was the eagle controversy. It's a perfectly fine eagle and there was nothing wrong with it.

Q: How was Jock Whitney as an Ambassador from your perspective?

OLSON: Very good. He was a nice enough guy and he had a good staff. Wally Barber was the DCM and he was doing a good job. Of course, it was a big social situation. I know that Betsy Whitney spent - being the Administrative Officer, I was in charge of all these kinds of things - I think it was $125,000 a year in flowers. Unbeknownst to me at that time was that Jock, amongst the other girlfriends that he ran around the place with, was our Ambassador to France, Pamela Harriman.

Q: Oh, Pamela. She was our Ambassador to France. One of the grand horizontals of Anglo-American relations.

OLSON: She had this relationship with Averell Harriman when I was in London, back in 1941. I didn't know that either. Then, a short time later, David Bruce came in as Ambassador for London. I had a very good and pleasant relationship with al of these

people. In 1962, I was asked if I wanted to be Economic Counselor in Vienna and I said, “Sure, but I'm supposed to stay as Administrative Counselor in London.” Findley Burns was actually out looking for my job in London and so David Bruce asked me what I wanted to do. He said that I could stay in London as long as I wanted, that I could have the Consul General gob. I told him that I thought that I would like to go back to Vienna, get back out of the substantive side once again. That was in 1962.

Q: Before we move on, the DCM with Jock Whitney was Wally Barbour. He was sort of a character of the Foreign Service. I'm not using this as a disparaging remark, but he was different than many of the people that you would run across. Could you talk about your impression of Wally Barbour?

OLSON: Wally was an old bachelor and he seemed to have no particular interest in the female species. He had a sister who lived in London. She wasn't there most of the time, but she was with him when he went to be Ambassador to Israel. Wally was very old school Foreign Service.

Q: Not too long ago, you suffered a serious stroke and, every once in a while, words don't come.

OLSON: It's not just that. Sometimes, I can't see very well either, when I'm reading something. But, on the whole, I'm damn lucky. I came out of it very well.

Q: While you were Administrative Officer, were there discussions about closing any of the Consulates in England or the UK?

OLSON: At that time, there was no real push behind that. Years earlier, there had been, by Dulles who was then the Secretary of State. Of course then afterward there were also. But I think they had closed one, or had before I got there and that was the one in Wales.

Q: Then you went to Vienna in 1962?

OLSON: Right.

Q: The Peace Treaty had been signed in 1956. How did you find Vienna and Austria when you went back? What were the elections?

OLSON: They were unbelievable. First of all, you had the damn Russians out of there and the Austrians were taking over their own country and doing it quite gracefully. The Austrians always had a wonderful approach to things. One thing they always did was to say how thankful they were to the United States for the help that we had given them and the aid we had given to them. I used to hear that so many times from the Foreign Minister, Kresky, who was a good friend of mine. I said, “You say this all of the time and our Congressmen love to hear it.” It's nice to know that's appreciated. He would just smile and say, “It doesn't really cost anything, does it?” They were very clever. The Peace Treaty settled just about everything. They had a hell of a lot of rebuilding to do, of factories and that sort of thing. Because, in the 1950's and at the end of the war, the Russians had looted everything that they could get their hands on out of the eastern section of Austria. That was one of my jobs when I was in Vienna, to assess what the Russians stole from the so-called USIA Complex. USIA was an organization of all the old factories, ex-German assets that the Russians had taken over. I did a big study of that and you could look at that and see what they were facing in the reconstruction. Commercial affairs were getting back to normal. There was East-West Trade side, but there was little left to do on that. The normal commercial things were flowing fairly freely.

Q: Who was the Ambassador when you were there?

OLSON: James Riddleberger.

Q: He's an old professional. How did you find him?

OLSON: A great guy. A fine fellow. I found him to be very professional. He was replaced by Tommy Thompson, who I had been with in Russia in 1941 to 1943.

Q: What were American interests in Austria at that time?

OLSON: I would say that our principal interest was to deny the territory and the assets of Austria to the Soviets. Our powers were somewhat limited now that they were a free country, an independent country. We had various factories there that made ball bearings, tractors, automobiles, and we had steelworks. Many industries of every type.

Q: Were you involved in the center for East-West spying?

OLSON: Oh, God, in the years of the Soviet occupation, we were up to our necks in it. Then, afterwards, we had a fairly widespread network with the CIA using Vienna as the center for the operation, down into Yugoslavia and into Hungary and all of the curtain countries.

Q: Did Austria play any sort of a role as a window onto the Soviet system? Did we find them a little bit different than one of the West European countries?

OLSON: Yes, we had the tradition of keeping an eye on Eastern Europe. So it was easy to continue that. Jim McCargar used to work down there for a while. I was not involved.

Q: You were there until 1962. Then where did you go?

OLSON: From 1962 to 1966. I arrived in Nigeria in the first days of the Biafran War and left four and a half years later in the last days.

Q: When you went out to Nigeria, you had not been an African hand at all. Did you go to Washington first before you went there?

OLSON: Yes, to check in.

Q: What were you told? What was the attitude towards Nigeria? I'm talking about when you went out in 1962.

OLSON: The attitude was that this was becoming the great country of Africa and it had the natural resources, the personnel, and the infrastructure to become a prosperous and developed country. That was the outlook when the war started.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the relationship between your arrival and the war in Biafra? Had it started when you arrived?

OLSON: It started shortly after my arrival.

Q: Was the Embassy aware that this was budding?

OLSON: Yes. They were having troubles with the Northern Nigerians, the so-called Hausas and with the Ibos who were the Biafrans. They only constituted about ten to twelve percent of the so-called area of Biafra. Biafra was a fictitious concept for the place called the Bight of Biafra, which the leader of the Biafrans, Ojukwu, decided was going to be his country. That included the Ibos and the Rivers Tribes. These people became essentially vassals to the Ibos. Ojukwu thought that the Ibos were the smartest of all the Africans. They may have been the most clever. He saw an opening and he thought he should be leader of an independent country.

Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time?

OLSON: Burt Matthews.

Q: What was the Embassy's view as this generated? Was there much sympathy for the Biafran cause?

OLSON: There was a lot of sympathy, but not for them as a separate state. A lot of sympathy for the Ibos because many had been attacked by the Northerners and had fled

south to the area of so-called Biafra. The Ibos were very good at ingratiating themselves throughout the western areas of Nigeria.

Q: What was the Embassy's view of the central government of Nigeria at that time?

OLSON: Our view was very good. When I first arrived there, General Gowon had just removed the Ibos, who had been in charge of the government. So, other parts of the Westerners in charge of Nigeria were overthrown in a small revolution. The highest ranking Northern Officer still alive after that revolution, General Gowon, was only a Lieutenant Colonel. The ranking Northerner just sort of picked up a Gowon and said, “You ought to be Chief of State and the Commander of Nigeria.” He was doing a great job when the war started.

Q: During this war, what was some of the pressures on the American Mission there at that time?

OLSON: One of the biggest pressures came from pro Ibo people associated with the State Department and the Embassy. Our policy as enunciated time and time again was to support the unity of Nigeria and to not supply either side with arms and to stay basically neutral. The sympathy that was developed in the States as a result of propaganda got the religious groups and the Middle West and all over the country to support the Ibos.

Q: I understand that you had the Protestants in the United States strongly for it, and the Jews strongly for it because Israel had connections with them. I suppose the Catholics, too.

OLSON: The Catholics were the ones that really started it, because of the Holy Ghost, Fatherland is very active in the Biafra area. They're the ones that really got the ball rolling.

Q: I found one of the more interesting manifestations of American problems in foreign policy was this mass support of the Ibo revolt by those that counted in the United States.

It was also in the UK, too. The Beatles gave their concerts for them and all of the movie stars and anyone who was anyone was supportive.

OLSON: Not quite so much in the UK as in the United States.

Q: How did you all deal with this?

OLSON: It wasn't easy, I'll tell you that. It was the end of a more promising side of my career because I was labeled - and rightly so - as the one who was holding Nigeria together. Even though I was not the Ambassador, I had been the continuity for all of these years.

Q: There were two Ambassadors.

OLSON: Yes, Bill Trueheart and Burt Matthews. They were both very good Ambassadors and fine guys. I seemed to have been by one that was designated to carry out the policy of keeping Nigeria together more than anything.

Q: Did you have trouble with your own Officers?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Can you talk about that?

OLSON: There were one or two Officers that I had trouble with and that was because they were Catholics and very religious. They were sympathetic more than they should have been to the Ibo point of view.

Q: How did this manifest itself?

OLSON: By sending in reports that were not agreed to by the Embassy. The biggest I had in this was a breakdown of authority. I was the Supervising Consul General. The Consul in Enugu, which was the Biafra area, Bob Barnerd, refused to obey my orders. I ordered

him and the personnel at the post to evacuate, get out, get his automobile and all of his personal possessions out of the Biafran area and he refused to do it.

Q: On what grounds?

OLSON: On the grounds that the post and personnel were in imminent danger. I didn't get the support from the Department I should have gotten, which said, “We'll let this pass over. Don't go into it head on.” I went along with that against my better judgment and then, low and behold, a few days later, Bob and some of the Officers at the Consulate went to the office and found they had no place to go to work. The Embassy had evacuated, lock, stock and barrel, without telling him.

Q: You mean the Consul?

OLSON: Ojukwu, head of the Biafran Government, moved the headquarters out and hadn't told the Consul. He was left sitting out there and had not gotten his car and his possessions out as I had ordered, and so it was all lost as the government troops moved in. I guess the State Department had to pick up the cost.

Q: What about your Ambassador? Was it Trueheart by that time?

OLSON: At that time, it was Matthews, but he left at the time this happened. Thus, it was left to me and that was alright with me. It was an outright case of insubordination.

Q: Who was Assistant Secretary? Was it David Newsom by that time?

OLSON: No, David wasn't there yet. It was Joe Palmer.

Q: I think this is very interesting to develop this. You gave a direct order and the direct order was refused.

OLSON: It wasn't carried out. Our communications were somewhat tenuous at that time.

Q: What was your feeling - that Washington didn't want to make an issue of this?

OLSON: Washington wouldn't support it at all. Washington felt that Barnerd and the Consulate were probably right, but they didn't have the guys to come and slap me down.

Q: Why did you want to get them out?

OLSON: They could have been murdered. What happened was, Barnerd and his staff left in one hell of a hurry for the part of Biafra that is still intact, and Biafra was starting to fall to pieces. They eventually had to get out by dugout canoes that took them over to our Consulate in the Cameroons. Jim Parker, Consul in Doula, Cameroons, carried out the evacuation of that group as the Federal forces overran that area. If they had stayed around, the chances were that they could have been murdered.

Q: To follow through on this, were either you or Barnerd called to reckon for this or not?

OLSON: Barnerd was called to reckon but, in the Department, people sympathized with him. The Department was indecisive as usual, particularly Joe Palmer, the Assistant Secretary.

Q: Why would that be? You're not talking about the rational weight, but the sympathetic weight. Is that what you're talking about?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: But we had a major policy, which we continue to have and that is Africa is a network of tribal issues and once you start unraveling this colonial thing, be it rational, be it what they may, that's what we got and any messing around with it will just lead to absolute chaos. At the very top this was our policy.

OLSON: We were so concerned to save their lives and get them out of there that we didn't quibble over it too much.

Q: Was the weight of what happened in the Congo in your mind at that time?

OLSON: It was in our minds in that the troops were pretty damn primitive. The Congo was on our mind also and anything could have happened. We didn't want to be responsible for the deaths of those people. Even more so, I ordered the Peace Corps to get out of there. The Director of the Peace Corps at that time was Jack Vaughn and he opposed this. There were 900 Peace Corps in Biafra at that time.

Q: In the Biafran area?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Good God.

OLSON: They didn't do it. Jack Vaughn was arguing with me that these people were prepared to stay behind and pick up the pieces. They had this silly theory in the back of their heads that the Peace Corps people could be useful by staying behind and supporting what was left. Well, they didn't understand Africa, I can tell you. Barnerd and the group left and immediately Ojukwu's forces had retreated and the Nigerians were moving in. Vaughn said that the Ambassador can't order us around like this. I said, “God dammit, you guys get the hell out of here. I don't want to be responsible and explain to your families what happened to you. It is our job in the Embassy to look after the security of American citizens and this is number one.” Nothing happened until the militant troops started moving down that way and, all of a sudden, there was panic. In the meantime, the arrangements that we had made to get them out of there were gone. They were no longer available, so Tom Smith and a couple of my other people went out to find whatever transportation they could find to get these people out. We got a hold of some old barges and a couple of tug boats that weren't really strong enough to do the job, but we loaded all 900 of these kids

aboard these barges. They were out in the open and, for two and one-half days, with Tom leading the groups, they went through the swamps of Central Nigeria. They were eaten up by mosquitoes and, occasionally, a bullet would whiz by.

Q: I find it incredible that, in the middle of a civil war, we had 900 people in an area under attack. I'm talking about the original decision to keep them there, not just when things were falling apart. Would you say that this was part of the political and emotional pressure to do that?

OLSON: The Department and the sympathizers had convinced the Peace Corps and all kinds of people that the Ibos would hold out and that there was no way that the Northerners could get in there. It became almost a religion.

Q: There was also support in Congress. It I recall, there was at least one Congressional Staffer who was just renowned. I can't remember his name right now.

OLSON: There were an awful lot of them. Two of them came out to visit Nigeria and were asking us what we were doing there and why we weren't we helping these poor Biafrans. Our policy was to hold fast. Congressman Charlie Godeel was one of them. They went down to Biafra and an air raid took place while they were there. They dove into the muck and were very proud of that. They left the mud on their clothes so that we could see it when they came out again. A lot of nonsense, but they sure got out in a hurry. The Department wouldn't believe me. I used to tell them that, if they didn't think my leadership was correct on this, then they better tell me to get out and I would go. I'm a Foreign Service Officer. But this was the way it was and this is the way it has to be. It ended up where I couldn't be named to any other post because Biafra was still such a hot issue.

Q: Before we move on, still in Nigeria, during these four and a half years, what sort of relations did you personally and then also the Embassy and our Ambassadors have with the Nigerians?

OLSON: On the whole, very good. The only time we had a bad situation, it was brought on by our people in Washington. I can't think of who the guy was now, but General Gowon was being told all of the time that his soldiers had to be careful that they didn't kill anybody unnecessarily and so on and so forth. This was the middle of a war. Gowon even established a code of conduct for his men and tried to enforce it. He did a pretty good job on that. But, if you're going to take several hundred thousand people out of the bush and don't have trained leaders to look after them and make sure they do the right things, you're going to have trouble no matter who it is. You get a bunch of fanatical Muslims, for instance, and see what they do in most any kind of situation in the war zone in that area down General Gowon's throat. They kept at it and kept at it and General Gowon kept saying, “We know what's in this report. We've seen it.

Q: When you say “our people,” who are you talking about?

OLSON: The State Department. They sent a Special Mission to Lagos to make sure that the reports were shown to the Nigerians and that they read this thing. I asked for an appointment with General Gowon to do this and the Secretary General of the Foreign Office said, “Are you sure that you want to do this? I don't think that it will be very well received.” I said that I realized that possibility, but I had my orders. I called to bring General Gowon over to discuss this and to deliver this report and things were heating up a bit. We got a call back from Gowon's office that we will not be able to receive your people and nor will we receive them anytime in the near future. Bingo! Our good relationship was flattened by these idiots in Washington insisting that we shove this down Gowon's throat. So, they went back to Washington dragging their tails behind them.

Q: Who were they? Were they Congress?

OLSON: No, they were State Department.

Q: We can fill in the names later.

OLSON: That was the situation. That was the straw that broke the camel's back for the time being on our relationship. Throughout, I could have seen Gowon anytime I wanted to. We had a very good personal relationship. This destroyed it.

Q: I heard that Gowon was familiar with Lincoln and our own civil war.

OLSON: Oh, yes. He was a student of that. If the United States had one friend in Nigeria, it was General Gowon.

Q: When you have an emotionally charged issue such as this thing and, obviously, in Nigeria as far as Gowon and his government are concerned, this is a matter of life or death and you have Americans for a variety of emotional and political reasons trying to push something on you. Did you find that you could operate on two levels, one to make him understand how people felt but, at the same time, continue the positive relations to get other things done?

OLSON: Yes, I think that on different levels you can operate, but when you can do that and be completely honest with your leaders in the Department or where your orders are coming from, is another thing.

Q: Because you can be undercutting your message.

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Did you feel any real engagement at the top? That would be Dean Rusk, who was obviously involved, and Lyndon Johnson was President. Did you feel any engagement there or did you feel that this whole thing was relegated down to the assistants?

OLSON: There was engagement at the top. I was told to cool it by David Newsom actually. I was within a gnat's eyelash of being removed if I didn't cool it. There was a conversation with Elliot Richardson, so I expected to have my ears knocked down by Richardson. He didn't do it. He said that I was doing fine and to continue with what I was doing.

Q: I'm interested in the role of the two Ambassadors.

OLSON: To get into that, Bill Trueheart was in charge when Secretary came out to Nigeria and went to a conference in Kinshasa with Trueheart. I stayed home and was in charge. I'm trying to think about how this worked out.

Q: Bill Rogers, you mean Secretary of State?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: That would have been Rusk, wouldn't it have been? You were there from when to when?

OLSON: 1966 to 1970.

Q: Okay, fine, that would have been Rogers.

OLSON: I'm trying t remember. This is the same report. This makes me so damn mad.

Q: We can always add these things, you know.

OLSON: What happened was this report, the Western Report. Rogers and Trueheart came back and we had dinner to discuss things. In a nutshell, I was asked by Rogers - I tried to carry out this order to show this report and I said I couldn't do it because Gowon wouldn't receive it - if I believed in doing this. And I said, “No, Sir, I did not believe in doing this.” Rogers got mad and he said, I believe, “I don't feel that much for any Officer who carries out an order that he doesn't believe in.” So, Trueheart stepped in at that point and

said to the Secretary, “Let's discuss this. Olson tried to carry this order out several times and cabled the Department on it and got nowhere. He kept coming back and got nowhere. You should not criticize him for this.” So, Rogers backed off on that. That was the kind of emotion - this was the Secretary of State on the issue of this one report. It's a lovely position to be in, to be caught in the middle.

Q: Oh, yes.

OLSON: Rogers had asked, “Why are the Nigerians so cold?” and I told him that it was because we tried to force that report down their throats.

Q: What were you getting on the military situation and the military attachés?

OLSON: This is something that I never felt comfortable with. Arthur Halligan, the Military Attaché, was sort of doing his own reporting and not all of it was approved. He was reporting with the acquiescence of the Ambassador. I went along with it because of the Ambassador, but I felt that some of the things were better left unsaid and unreported. The great stream of consciousness reporting by Halligan would get into tremendously long telegrams. It was all very anti-Biafran and he sort of made fun of them a little bit. I think that irritated the hell out of the Department. But this was coming from the military, not from the Embassy. In retrospect, long ago, I felt that reporting on that should have been more tightly controlled.

Q: This doesn't seem like a situation where the CIA would have been of much help. In a military situation, who's going to win and who's going to lose is not the type of thing that the CIA could get into. But how did you find it at that time?

OLSON: Their reports were generally useful but they weren't determinate to any extent.

Q: Trueheart was caught in another one of these great emotional things, he had been Deputy Chief of Mission in Vietnam and came out of that where he had been in a very

controversial time on how we deal with Diem, where he did not support the overthrow of Diem. It meant that he had been in a crossfire there as a Deputy Chief of Mission and, all of a sudden, finds himself in Nigeria, which was not his field of expertise. He was just assigned there. Did you think that maybe he was trying to duck a bit?

OLSON: No, in all fairness, I can say that he didn't duck. With what I knew of Vietnam, I thought he might have. I can say that Bill Trueheart regarded me as the expert on the Nigeria situation and he generally accepted my judgment on things. He generally let me determine what would be done and so forth. He was probably wrong to do this as it turned out.

Q: I think our policy, in the long run, the one you were supporting, certainly came out to be the rational policy.

OLSON: Sure, it was. The real Devil behind the scenes in the overall thing and, mind you, he didn't pay that much attention to it, was Henry Kissinger. He knew what was going on, he knew about this argument, but the only reference in his book regarding Nigeria and that policy was that “Our people in the Embassy said that this should be the policy and I suppose they're right.”

Q: During the 1969 to 1970 period, Henry Kissinger was the National Security Advisor, did you feel his fine hand in there?

OLSON: I felt his fine hand through some of his staff members who were behind this and they are the ones who tried to cut my throat when I was finally named Ambassador. A fellow by the name of Roger Morris. I was nose to nose with him in front of Fulbright and Fulbright knocked his ears down to his ankles.

Q: What was Roger Morris?

OLSON: He was a staff member of the National Security Council. He refused to give up on trying to get me nailed for the Biafrans not winning the war. I was investigated down to my little toe.

Q: What were they trying to prove?

OLSON: They were trying to prove that I was unfit to become Ambassador to the great country of Sierra Leone. There's one more thing that I would like to add about your question pertaining to guidance from the top. We had an Ambassador's conference with Kissinger and one of the boys said, “Well, Mr. Secretary, what do you think we should do about our overall African policy?” Kissinger said, “Keep it quiet boys, keep it quiet.”

Q: This was later on, yes. This was when Kissinger would try to keep out of some areas.

OLSON: Yes, he wasn't involved in Africa at all.

Q: He got involved later on towards the very end of his career in Libya and Mongolia.

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Q: Today is April 18, 1996. Before we move to the time that you were an inspector, let's talk a bit about when you were in Vladivostok during the war. Could you tell me a little about that period?

OLSON: Our mission was to assist the Soviets in getting more supplies through to help the Red Army and we had three different routes. One came through North Russia, Archangel and Murmansk, another one through the Persian Gulf and the third through Vladivostok. I spent the spring and summer of 1942 in Murmansk and we talked a bit about that already. Then I had been down to the Persian Gulf to establish communications with our mission in Russia with the Persian Gulf Command, which had moved in to facilitate the delivery

of supplies through Iran. The one place that was sort of forbidden to us, that we didn't get much information on was Vladivostok, so I was sent out to Vladivostok.

Q: When was this?

OLSON: This would have been the spring of 1943. I was to find out how they were handling our supplies. We were worried that they were piling up there. We had heard rumors that the port of Vladivostok was choked by American supplies arriving via the Pacific. I applied to the powers in the Soviet Union in charge of Far Eastern Shipping and similar people for permission to inspect the port of Vladivostok. This was a really forbidden territory. No American to my knowledge had stepped foot inside of the Harbor of Vladivostok since the early 1930's. It was regarded as a secret area. I persisted in going after the Soviets to get this permission and I was not succeeding very well and they kept me waiting and kept putting us off. Until, finally, I had been there for about a month and so I talked to the Chief of the Communist Party of the Far East and the Chief of Far Eastern Shipping and told them I had been sent there on a mission to see how they were handling our supplies coming through Vladivostok and from the Far East in general. I was being denied permission to do this. So, I had to assume that the reports of the cargoes rotting in Vladivostok were true, and that I was going to recommend to the President that we not ship anymore supplies through Vladivostok and use another route. Then, I stuck my neck out from here to Vladivostok. I said that I could assure them the President would accept my recommendation. Roosevelt would have told me to shut up and get out of the way. The next day, I had a call from the Chief of Far Eastern Shipping, who said the Chief of the port of Vladivostok would be pleased to invite me to inspect the port of Vladivostok at 8:00 tomorrow morning. I thought that was wonderful. We had a naval attaché who was visiting Vladivostok at that time, Commander George Roulard, and so I took him along with me to inspect the port. That upset the Soviets a little bit. I don't know what they thought, but they did not like the idea of a Naval Officer being along. It worked. We inspected the port of Vladivostok and found that they had ample equipment to take care of the task and they were doing a good job. There was no clogging of the port. The supplies were being moved

out in very good fashion. After the inspection and the report, we were invited to a luncheon on board the first Soviet Merchant ship that was built after the Revolution. A ship called the Kim and the Captain of that was sort of a senior official of shipping. His name was Captain Rudnick. We had a very liquid luncheon with our Naval Officer bowing out after an hour or two. I held forth with Captain Rudnick until late the next afternoon. Needless to say, we were in good shape by that time. I think they were trying to make me forget what I had seen. So, I reported back to Angus Ward, the Consul General, and started to tell him what I had discovered and he shook his head in absolute amazement. He told me that he thought I was perfectly normal until I started repeating myself. Roulard and I put together a very detailed report on the port of Vladivostok and then I returned to Moscow.

Q: Tell me just before we leave this episode, we had a consul General in Vladivostok already with Angus Ward at the head of it and James McCargar, who's been interviewed previously. I take it that they were not able to see the port?

OLSON: No, they were not able to see the port. In fact, the Consul General's office was on Tegrova Hill and they were almost confined to that spot. They could go down to the Hotel Chilusken to get meals, which was just down the hill. It was an interesting experience because the dining room was always full of Japanese. We still had relations with Japan at that time.

Q: The Soviets had relations with Japan. We were enemies at the time.

OLSON: Yes. So, you would be there having a meal and there would be half a dozen or more Japs around who were often times making loud derogatory remarks in English so that we could hear them. The Consul General, the number two officer, was Jim McCargar, who was the Vice Consul at this post. Then there was another fellow there who was an administrative assistant.

Q: Here we're allies with the Soviets, pushing equipment through and here is a Consulate Staff kept practically in confinement. How did you find the outlook of the Soviets from Angus Ward and company and also the morale of the staff? Did you get any feel for that?

OLSON: The morale of the staff was good. Angus had a Lithuanian wife.

Q: One of the holy terrors of the Foreign Service.

OLSON: Right. And she hated the Soviets and that was obvious. When we would leave the Consulate General, the NKVD guys were always across the street, looking through lace curtains and peering at us. If any of us took off to go toward the town or elsewhere, they would immediately have one fellow dash out - at least this was with me; they probably kept a close eye on me since I was a visitor to the area - into the street on the same side in front of me and another guy would fall in behind me and there would be another one across the street. So, as I would go along, there were three men that had me cornered at all times. I used to go down the hill and have dinner occasionally with Angus Ward, who lived some blocks away. I can remember on one particularly cold winter night when the snow was blowing and I could look out under the street lamps and see my three guards out there trying to keep warm. I would say to Angus, “I would like another drink, thank you” and keep them out there. One night, when I was followed home - I felt like having some fun with them - I started walking very fast to get home and they were in back of me going fast, and eventually they were running down the street in front of me. I invited them to walk with me, but they obviously didn't like my company. I was cursing them out a bit and saying, “If you don't like my company, what are you following me for all of the time?” It was a childish sort of thing.

Q: Did you go by train?

OLSON: Yes. It took about 12 days to get to Vladivostok. There was no dining car, there were no facilities for food on the trains, so I would fill a parachute bag full of Spam and

bread, some wine, a little Vodka. I had an alcohol stove and I always took Ivory soap, I had learned that in North Russia. I would buy big bars of Ivory soap and I found that I could barter a half bar of Ivory sop for 13 - a “duckina” eggs. I could cook up some Span and eggs right in the compartment. The first day or two going in each direction, I would leave the door open and the smell of my cooking would go down through the car. I would invite one of the passerbys to come in and share a drink with me. Recognizing me as a foreigner, they would at first refuse. Before long, one of them couldn't stand it anymore. He'd come in and shut the door. I would supply him with booze and, pretty soon, the whole car would be in there talking up a storm. For example, I had a Soviet Naval Captain to whom I remarked that, according to Pravda, the United States was producing 48,000 armored vehicles a year. The Russian Admiral said, “48,000 is a lot.” He would then tell me how many Russia was producing and I was keeping track of that. Jim McCargar had his experience with the swallows, but I never ran into them on the train.

Q: These are the girls that are assigned by the KGB as comfort ladies.

OLSON: I never saw any of that action in Vladivostok. I did have a case with the most famous female sniper in the Soviet Union, Ludmilla Pavlachinko. She came into my compartment on the train. I invited her in for a drink. She closed the door after a while and put her arms around me and she said in Russian, “I love you very much.” I said, “You're wonderful, too.” This gal was a head taller than I was and, when she embraced me, it made my ribs creak. I poured her another loaded drink and eventually got her out the door. There were some interesting times. I collected information along the way. Attachés were rarely allowed to travel, so I kept track of mileage and so on. Then the thing that I got involved in inadvertently, was I had been told to watch out for a tunnel that the Russians were building under the Amur River, where there's a single span bridge that's a mile long across the river that separated Mongolia from Russia and the Maritime provinces. Just by accident, the car that I was on was shunted off to the side and there, staring me right in the eye of the compartment window, was the mouth to a tunnel. That tunnel had been rumored to exist 20 years before but no one had proved its existence. I had my camera

handy and I got a picture of this tunnel with a guard standing at its mouth. Then I was able to identify a ventilator system in the middle of the river and excavations on the other side, which proved there was a tunnel there. Nobody saw me, so it was a perfect piece of espionage. I carried the pictures back to Washington myself. In Washington, I called on Andre Growiko, the Soviet Chargé d'affaires. We discussed the Military Supply Program and my trip to Siberia. A few days later, I was invited to have lunch with the Chief of the Soviet Purchasing Commission, who was an Admiral, and with a staff member one of the officials from the Washington side of the Military Supply Program. We were having lunch and we were making conversation. The Admiral asked me how I liked my trip to Siberia. Then he looked me in the eye and said, “I understand you found our tunnel under the Amur River particularly interesting.” I though, “Lord Jesus, somebody has already talked.” I said, “Oh, yes, I'm an engineer and found that to be a very interesting engineering project.” Then I hit them between the eyes and I said, “It doesn't look like you're using it very much. All the rails going into it are rusty.” They recoiled on that one. That finished the prospect of future duty in the Soviet Union once and for all.

Q: They wouldn't have you again.

OLSON: I was labeled as having committed major acts of espionage. I immediately contacted the FBI and they pursued the people that were involved for several years. We knew pretty well who it was, who had leaked the story. I think he was just very naive and thought this was nothing important.

Q: There were still people who were treating the Soviets as absolute allies and it's very hard to reconstruct that period and during the McCarthy period, they never tried to distinguish between those that really were essentially agents and other ones who just felt that the Russians were like the British and that we could deal with them in exactly the same way.

OLSON: You had to be careful with the British, too. When we found out that Averell Harriman was sleeping with Pamela, she learned everything that she wanted to know about the American side.

Q: Now we're going to go back. You left Nigeria and you went into the Inspection Corps. When were you there?

OLSON: I was there during 1971 and 1972. I inspected until 1972 when I was in Saigon and my wife, Hoov - a nickname; short for Hoover, her maiden name - was there with me at the time. Hoov had just arrived in Saigon with Ambassador Bunker on his plane and she got off the plane and she said, “Well, you've heard the news, haven't you?” I said, “No, what news?” She said, “Earlier this week, the President named you Ambassador to Sierra Leone.” I hadn't heard that.

Q: I want to go back and discuss your time with the Inspection Corps.

OLSON: That's the end.

Q: Yes, let's go back to talk about being in the Inspection Corps. Having come out of this place and being the man in the middle and being identified with an unpopular policy in Nigeria, did you feel that our assignment to the Inspection Corps was to kind of keep you out of the line of fire for a while, or was it just an assignment?

OLSON: It was to keep me out of the line of fire. They thought that we should let things cool off with the emotion that had been aroused. I was happy to go to the Inspection Corps and keep the guys like Roger Morris from torpedoing me.

Q: Do you go by Ole or Clint?

OLSON: Both.

Q: I think that most of the people that I know in the Foreign Service talk about you as Clint, and I noticed that last night they were talking about you as Ole.

OLSON: Anybody named Olson automatically picks up the name Ole.

Q: In the Inspection Corps, what was the role of the Inspectors at that time? It changes from time to time.

OLSON: It has changed a great deal.

Q: But we're talking about the early 1970s. How did you see the role of the Inspector?

OLSON: The role of the Inspector at that time was the traditional role that has been going on for years and years. You would visit a post and you were armed with information about all kinds of situations for that specific post that you were to look into and to do something about it and to make recommendations on changes that would help the Service. The usual thing was to see what resources you had at your disposal at the post, whether they were sufficient, or whether they were lacking. The same applied to the staff. Whether they were of adequate quality and if they were individually or as a whole, were they doing a good job. Or were corrections necessary? Then you would write an Inspectors Performance Rating on all Americans at the post. In my time, in the old days, they didn't show that to the person being rated, which was quite unfair. When I began inspecting, one didn't usually show people what was written, but I did and discussed it with them. You would make recommendations as to what additional resources were needed in any particular post, how the personnel were performing and what should be done about it. For example, on my first Inspection Tour, the Ambassador to Jamaica was completely incompetent for the job and was a real horse's ass. He wasn't performing well, but he was protected by certain high officials of the Department and Administration.

Q: Was he a career Officer?

OLSON: No. You may remember the case. This was Vincent de Roulet.

Q: Oh, yes. This is quite famous within the Foreign Service. He wouldn't allow Visa people to use the bathroom and other things like that.

OLSON: He had all kinds of odd things about him. I wasn't really sent to formally inspect that Embassy, but was asked by Fraser Wilkins to look things over.

Q: Who was Inspector General?

OLSON: Yes, he was Inspector General at that time, set me a rocket and asked if I wanted to take a look at Jamaica. I had just finished inspecting Haiti. He said to spend a few days there and for me to let him know what I thought. I'd planned to spend a few days in Jamaica anyway with the British Ambassador, who was a close friend of mine, so I spent a week living with the British Ambassador, inspecting de Roulet. I wrote a pro forma Performance Inspection Report that didn't say anything and then I wrote a hand-written one and really laid it on the line. I sent that back to the Department. I recommended that they pull this guy out as fast as they could. It was really a mess. It was almost a year later before de Roulet was recalled. The Jamaican government finally acted by declaring him Persona Non Grata. It was pretty embarrassing.

Q: Where was his political support coming from?

OLSON: de Roulet had gone to college with Bob Haldeman. de Roulet said to me when I began the inspection, “We don't pay any attention to these guys.” He said, “If I want something, I just get in touch with Bob and, if he doesn't take care of it, then the President will.” It was a horrible case. He was there with a 90-foot yacht which never had the sails up, he just motored around. He had a lovely wife. She was the daughter of Gussie Whitney. That's what you do in the Inspector Corps.

Q: What was the morale like at the Embassy?

OLSON: Terrible. They all knew that he was a four-letter word and nobody had any use for him, but they had to toe the line.

Q: How was the DCM managing under those circumstances?

OLSON: I'm trying to think who the DCM was at that point. He was having a very hard time and he wasn't able to do very much. Sort of powerless.

Q: Were there any other particularly notable places that you were?

OLSON: Let me finish this story. I came back after this inspection and went into the Department. We had our annual meeting with the Secretary who was Rogers at the time and Rogers said, “I know that everyone that you inspect is not the paragon of virtue. What do you do about a case like that? How do you handle it?” Here it had been over a year with de Roulet getting away with this. The Secretary said, “Do you call these things to the attention of appropriate authorities and then do something about it?” I said, “Yes, Mr. Secretary, we try to do something about it when it's within our power.” At that point, Butts Macomber, who was the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration at that time and in charge of the inspections among other things, suddenly looked up and said, “Oh, yes, Mr. Secretary.” Butts had remained absolutely silent up until that point. We had a case and you'll probably hear about it, about de Roulay. On the Inspection side, I started out like any other inspector. I inspected Venezuela and Haiti and, as I told you, Jamaica, Honduras, and some other posts down in Latin America. Then I was sent to Africa and inspected about half the posts in Africa. Then I inspected Luxembourg and Belgium and all of the missions around NATO and the OECD and so on. After that, I was sent to Saigon.

Q: Can you talk about how the inspection went in Saigon when you were there? You were there in 1972, which was the last of the real full inspections of Saigon. What was your impression of our effort there at that time?

OLSON: That's a $64 question. The military effort was going on as before. We had an awful lot of air raids of various kinds from the “ARCLIGHTS.” Do you know about the “ARCLIGHTS?”

Q: Yes, these were the B-52s.

OLSON: I was in a staff meeting every morning when I was in Saigon and we'd discuss about the ARCLIGHTS. I spent quite a bit of time on that, and also at Bien hoa, which is where the actual air operations were centered. With our policy, I couldn't at the time think of any way to change it, just continue the bombing and try to end the war, if possible, that way. Of course, we had tied our hands by preventing bombing Haiphong. I had doubts about the Cord's Program, which was really quite successful, but I had doubts about how long that would last. I had grave doubts about sending our Cord's gang out to some of these isolated areas and I was just wondering how soon it was going to be before some of them got wiped out by being in locations like that. I thought that it was a very brave program and I thought that our Officers performing in it were doing extremely well. I had, along with the normal senior inspectors in my team, some Junior Officers who were inspecting the Cord's Officers and spending nights in the “boonies” with them. They were reporting on wonderful guys like young Ray Hare and Frank Wisner. I had no particular criticisms.

Q: How did you find reporting with the Embassy? What was the impression at that time?

OLSON: The impressions were that Ambassador Bunker, of course, was performing in his usual excellent fashion. The Officer who was handling our traffic was the Chief Political Reporting Officer. I can't remember his name at the moment. I thought that was going pretty well. As an inspector, this guy that I'm thinking of, who was a senior official in Saigon, had an affair going with a beautiful Vietnamese girl and I think that confused some of his concerns. It's just as well that I don't know his name, I guess.

Q: At that time, if you saw "extracurricular activities" of that nature going on, what did the inspector do? It wasn't just in Saigon, it was in other places. Sometimes this has an effect on performance.

OLSON: It does and, actually, the Department was at that time starting the business that you don't report on the family in any way. When I was inspecting, that was just beginning. Most of my inspections had some reports on confidential reports on some situations like that. A good example is one case where the Officer was a personal friend of mine and his wife was involved with one of the Senior Military Officers. I knew this couple well enough that I became aware of that and I had a chat with the wife and told her that this had become a well-known thing and that I'd hat to see her get in trouble with her husband, or in any other way. I told her that it really wasn't any of my business, but that I sure wished that she would knock it off and save herself. And she did. It was never in any report, but it straightened out. You had to know somebody pretty damn well to approach them, and I had known this couple for all of my career in the Service. So you had those kinds of things and then you had a large number of bachelors or at least "temporary" bachelors, so you were going to have some "liaisons" develop along the line. The best thing to do in Saigon was to ignore them. You know that Saigon was really special in that regard. I think I finessed that one.

Q: When you heard about going to Sierra Leone, can you tell me how that developed?

OLSON: As I told you earlier, my wife told me in Saigon that I had been named Ambassador to Sierra Leone and that surprised me. A couple of days later, I did get the message from the Department. They asked me if there was nay reason that I could not accept this post. Then, of course, I was all set to go through the procedures of being named and confirmed when Roger Morris caught up with me.

Q: Can you tell us about that?

OLSON: One of the guys in the Department, a friend of mine, said, “I heard about your assignment to Sierra Leone, did you know that they're going to try and block that?” I was in a state of shock. I said, “What on earth for?” He said, “There's a couple of disgruntled people who are out to get you.” I said, “Well, that's lovely news. Why and how? What have they got to go on?” It turned out that it was this Consul who disobeyed my orders and who was assigned to Hong Kong along the line. Bob Barnard had gotten together with some of the pro Biafra people in the Department. One was a Junior Officer and was not only pro Biafra, but he was almost a Catholic priest he was so deeply involved in religion. They were the ones who tried to torpedo my appointment to Sierra Leone.

Q: Along with Roger Morris?

OLSON: Yes, Roger was the key man, I think.

Q: He was still with the NSC at that point?

OLSON: I think he had just left the NSC. He was hanging around the Department in some capacity. I told you that I was investigated by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a fellow named Henderson, who was the Chief of Staff of the Foreign Relations Committee. They examined me down to my little toenail for about a month, but Roger insisted on testifying.

Q: Can you explain how that happened?

OLSON: The Senate Committee told Roger Morris, “Look, we've investigated Mr. Olson down to the nth degree and we find that his record is damn near perfect and there is no basis for any complaints on the part of the Foreign Relations Committee for the way that he has conducted his entire career. If you insist on making these kinds of charges because you will get the “black eye” not only from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but from the State Department and elsewhere. So, we recommend that you do not testify on Mr. Olson's appointment before the Committee.” Well, Roger Morris ignored that and did

testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senator Bill Fulbright said, “Mr. Morris, do you have anything to add to that?” He said, “No” and they said, “Our Committee thinks that Mr. Olson is a fine Officer and we're going to recommend confirmation. We don't want to hear any more from you.” The Foreign Relations Committee, including the staff on the Committee who had been briefed by Morris, who tried to torpedo me, confirmed me 100% with no dissent. It was a rather trying experience.

Q: Absolutely.

OLSON: I didn't want to be Ambassador to Sierra Leone that much, to go through that. But, when you're faced with that sort of thing, you have to see it through.

Q: You were Ambassador to Sierra Leone from when to when?

OLSON: From the summer of 1972 to the winter of 1974.

Q: When you went out there, what did you see as American interests in Sierra Leone?

OLSON: That's an interesting question. Quite frankly, I don't think we had any great interests there. It was just another West African country. There was very little of international interest. There were some Chinese fiddling about in the background and the Russians, of course. They had an Ambassador there and a Mission. I would have recommended that we have one super Ambassador for several of those small countries and have charge instead of having a full scale Mission in those countries.

Q: Soapy Williams was the one who made the determination that we would put an Ambassador in every African country and it's something that we've been living with ever since.

OLSON: Soapy did it, and I think my good friend Dave Newsom went along with it at the time. I've never talked to Dave about whether he's had second thoughts about that.

Q: What was the political situation in Sierra Leone when you were there?

OLSON: The political situation basically was that the country had been run by the Creole types, who were sort of a distinguished lot. Fourah Bay University in Sierra Leone was about the leading African university and there was a cluster of African intellectuals who worked out of Fourah Bay and were doing a good job. They were the culture of Sierra Leone. Then the people from up country, the tribal sort of thing got out of control, the government under Siaka Stevens.

Q: Was this before you got there?

OLSON: Yes, before I got there. Siaka Stevens was definitely running the show with a bunch of somewhat primitive people from up country, running the various Ministries and so on. There was no great problem, except to see that African culture pushed aside, including the academic field and taken over by the somewhat primitive people. Siaka Stevens was the head of that group and he became a dictator, like most of them do. He was a remarkable man financially, because his salary was something like $12,000 a year and he was able to build some high-rise apartments in the Canary Islands during his tenure. He was robbing the country like so many others. They had as a great resource the diamond mines and controlling of the diamonds. There was much smuggling and it could not be stopped. There was the famous case of the robbery at Sierra Leone airport where a diamond shipment was set down in Freetown and gangsters came in and robbed the whole lot. We're sure that was staged by Siaka Stevens and a Lebanese diamond merchant. You read “Diamonds Are Forever,” didn't you? That was the opening scene.

Q: That was a book by Ian Fleming. What do you think about the Chinese Communists and their role in the country?

OLSON: It was very minor in Sierra Leone and I would say minor in all of Western Africa. But in East Africa it was another picture. They built the railroad in Tanzania. They were in

there pretty deep. The Soviets were every place else to some degree. Nigeria was their number one target, with all its resources in the form of personnel, money and what have you. West Africans just aren't built for Communism. They're all basically capitalists at heart. How they make their money and so on. As I said to you, in retrospect of my years in West Africa, I was in favor of turning it over to the Soviets and letting them try to straighten it out.

Q: Did you find in Sierra Leone that you were playing any particular role, or was it more watching? Did the British have the prime foreign influence?

OLSON: No, the British didn't have too much influence here. At one point, the watching game for us was that we were suddenly aware of outside intelligence operations and, in fact, there was an attempt to penetrate into our Embassy and the Israeli Embassy by the Palestinians. We found that our cars were being followed and so through intelligence activity external to Sierra Leone, we were aware, we had been alerted and checked it out and, sure enough, we were being shadowed all over the place. It was the Palestine Organization headed by George Habash. It became somewhat alarming. We got the Israel Ambassador to complain to President Stevens and I sounded off on that also. This was a dangerous situation. We increased our security around the Embassy and around the Israeli Embassy. Unhappily, the Israelis were located almost together on an isolated hill. We finally convinced the President of Sierra Leone that something had to be done about this. The President got in touch with the leader of the Lebanese community, who had also been involved with the diamond hijacking and told him that something had to be done. The Lebanese leader was told that if anything happened to the American Ambassador or the Israeli Ambassador as a result of these people being around, he was going to throw all of the Lebanese out of the country. So, George Habash's guys disappeared after that. We had no further threats. We were going around armed for awhile and the President very kindly gave me a personal guard to secure me around the house at night. This personal guard would arrive at dusk and spread a blanket on the ground and tell my regular guards to wake him up if anything happened. I went to check on a couple of different nights. One

night, I stole his Tommy gun while he was asleep and all of my guards were asleep, too. Pretty soon, somebody came knocking on the door in the middle of the night, saying, “Somebody had stolen my Tommy gun.” I said, “I wonder who that could have been.”

Q: When you were dealing with the George Habash organization, that's serious. How about the UN votes? This was always one of the things that Ambassadors of every country and particularly the smaller countries. Each year, there is a list sent out of UN votes. How did you find Sierra Leone responded to this?

OLSON: They voted against us most of the time. Then you'd have a long talk with the President and tell him how important it was that Sierra Leone support us and they would promise that, yes, they'd do it, but then they would vote the other way.

Q: Did they belong to a particular group in the UN?

OLSON: It was just the Africans in the UN, not any special African group.

Q: But there was no particular ideology behind it?

OLSON: Who knows. It was mostly voting against the great imperial powers.

Q: Did we have much economic interest in the area?

OLSON: The diamonds and we had a rutile mine that we were involved in. Titanium Dioxide is rutile, the ore of that and Pittsburgh Plate Glass, PPG, was interested in that and also Bethlehem Steel. They jockeyed back and forth as to who would control this and it was a very difficult thing because the rutile was a volcanic rock and very rough and rugged that would wipe out digging equipment very rapidly. There were a lot of problems with that. On the other side of the coin, you had the people from the States who wanted to buy the rutile, that were being pressured to contribute something to the President. There was a lot of that sort of thing. There was no overwhelming economic responsibility there.

Q: When did you leave there?

OLSON: I ceased to be the Chief of the Mission in the fall of 1974. I was then held onto for some months as a Political Ambassador while they were waiting for a replacement to come along. The Kissinger rule at the time was that if you'd been Ambassador to one country, then you should get the hell out and let somebody else have t hat position. It was a stupid rule in some respects. So, I said farewell to being an Ambassador. I did have the opportunity to continue as a Chief of Mission, but that would have been to the West African country of Mauritania.

Q: At that point, you retired?

OLSON: Yes. At that point, I was rather fed up with the business. I was not impressed by the Administration of the Department at that time, in particular the Director General.

Q: Who was that?

OLSON: Well, there were a couple of them there. Harry Barnes was one of them who wasn't very effective. Carol Laise was fine. The other guy was Ambassador to Chile. He was involved in the business of Latin America.

Q: Allende.

OLSON: Yes, Allende. So, at that point, I asked Hoov if she would like another Embassy and she said, “Would you?” I think I told her that this was all in theory, but that I didn't think I would. She said, “Even if it were into the Court of St. James?” I said, “No, I don't think I'd be interested even in that.” After the struggle over the policy of Nigeria and then over my confirmation as Ambassador to Sierra Leone, I was sort of fed up with things. I looked forward to retiring.

Q: I would like to think you very much. I appreciate this.

OLSON: I don't know if you got what you were looking for.

Q: Oh, I did.

End of interview